

KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND
NEW YORK
SENATOR
RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
SUITE 478
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205
202-224-4451

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC WORKS
AGRICULTURE
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

February 4, 2021

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Alexander,

At the onset of 2021 and a new presidential administration, we still find our country battling multiple health crises, including an increase in untreated mental and behavioral health disorders. The pandemic has spurred increases in substance use, overdoses, depression, and anxiety. Studies have found that worry and stress related to COVID have had a major negative impact on many Americans' mental health, particularly for those who have lost income or a job. In June, over 40% of surveyed adults reported a negative mental or behavioral health condition related to COVID, including 31% who reported anxiety or depression symptoms, 13% who started or increased their substance use, and 11% who seriously considered suicide over the past month. It is critical that we address this troubling trend.

We are grateful for the funding that has already been provided to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in previous COVID-response packages, including \$4.25 billion in the December 2020 bipartisan omnibus package, but more assistance is needed. We respectfully request that the next COVID response bill include \$10 billion in funding for SAMHSA, dedicated to the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant and Community Mental Health Services Block Grant programs.

Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant Program

We request that \$5 billion be designated for the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant (SABG) program. The CDC reported over 81,000 drug overdose deaths in the United States between July 2019 and June 2020. This is the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period. While Congress has made great strides in addressing the COVID-19 response, we cannot ignore the worsening addiction crisis. SABG provides funding to states and territories to plan, implement, and assess activities that both prevent and treat substance use disorder. This funding is necessary to increase prevention efforts and ensure that individuals with substance use disorders can receive life-saving treatment, despite the additional barriers posed by COVID-19.

Community Mental Health Services Block Grant Program

KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND
NEW YORK
SENATOR
RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
SUITE 478
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205
202-224-4451

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC WORKS
AGRICULTURE
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

We request that \$5 billion be designated for the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant (MHBG) program. Of the more than 30% of American adults who recently reported having symptoms consistent with an anxiety and/or depressive disorder, over 20% reported needing, but not receiving, mental health counseling or therapy. Based on increases in depressive disorder and unmet mental health needs, as well as data collected during the 2003 SARS epidemic pointing to the likelihood of increased suicides in a number of demographic groups, many researchers remain concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic will result in an increase in suicides. MHBG provides comprehensive, community-based mental health services to adults and children and supports implementation of a comprehensive, community-based mental health system. Given the surge of new mental health needs due to COVID-19, it is imperative that we provide robust funding to expand access to effective mental health treatments.

As COVID-19 continues into the new year, we must not lose sight of the addiction and mental health crisis we faced before the onset of the pandemic, and which has only been exacerbated by it. These behavioral and mental health services are crucial to save lives and improve Americans' well-being. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator